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THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

DECEMBER 5 1980

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Misguided tour

By David Gascoyne

MARCEL JOUHANDEAU:

Journal sous l'Occupation suivi de La Courbe de nos négocies 385pp. Paris: Gallimard.

The first collection of any consequence of his poetry was illustrated by Graham Sutherland, and contained a section devoted to Personal Poems, headed by a couple of optimistic paragraphs from Marcel Jouhandeau's early *M. Godeau* *Intime*. They ended with this question, which at the time seemed very relevant to my youthful self: "N'est-ce pas de la vie?" Earlier, as a fitting epigraph to the Journal that I kept in Paris during the year or two I spent there before the war, I had affixed this phrase from Jouhandeau's *Alphée*: "Peut-être un jour, cette solitude continuera de la vie?" Earlier, as a fitting epigraph to the Journal that I kept in Paris during the year or two I spent there before the war, I had affixed this phrase from Jouhandeau's *Alphée*: "Peut-être un jour, cette solitude continuera de la vie?"

When the war was over, I found that the one or two later Jouhandeau works I was able to look into contained this feeling about there being some sort of flaw in him, though I believe I would no longer then have ascribed this to his own will to an overponderance of "aestheticism", despite the fact that by the time I was pretty well "into" Jouhandeau and just therefore have been aware of the Danish philosopher's well-known "three stages", and the severe distinction to be drawn between the "merely" aesthetic and the truly religious. Jouhandeau is in my mind one of those great twentieth-century writers of French and English, as most readers of this post-humously published *Journal* will surely agree, even if reluctantly; but it is difficult not to be irritated

at times by the absorption of a certain sort of preciousness into a few of his early works, such as the otherwise undeniably fascinating *Opus*. And there was something I didn't care for at all about his post-war *Don Juan*.

Marcel Jouhandeau was born in 1888, the son of a huncher in a small country town near Limoges, the Garet which under the name of "Chamadeau" has probably immortalized in some of his best novels, short stories, barely fictionalized memoirs and chronicles. Though for many years a dedicated professor at a school in Paris, run up by priests (necessity for the most part of a broad-minded persuasion), Jouhandeau was able to produce an astonishing amount of written and published work belonging to a variety of categories, including at least four plays. Perhaps all his playfully exaggerated accounts of his life with the ineffable Elise, of which the best known are *Alphée*, *Elise* and the nine volumes of *Scènes de la vie conjugale*.

Journal sous l'Occupation covers the period 1939-1945. The note on the back cover gently underlines the cause of the most serious of the misgivers described in the end of the book by referring to Jouhandeau as not having great political discernment. His intense preoccupation with an inner life, of a quite genuinely religious though dubiously orthodox Catholic nature, his untiring devotion to his work as a schoolmaster and to his pupils, and the misadventures of being married to an ex-cubane dancer turned Xanthippe, left him little time to pay much attention to such unpleasant political facts as the bombing of the books in Germany, the activities of the interior police, the *Capitulation*, to cite but a few items of the kind that were disturbing the majesty of French writers during the 1930s. There is no factual justification for saying that Jouhandeau was pro-Franco, but if he was, it would have been an account of such abominable

notions as those that misled Roy Campbell, for instance. His anti-Communism was not that of the most reactionary bourgeois in the West but rather that of a self-made intellectual of peasant stock, whose piety led him to accept without much question what the clergy he frequented advised him with regard to this subject.

In April 1941, Jouhandeau, wishing to visit the Creuse region in order to attend to some business affairs connected with a few small properties he owned there, applied for the visa that would enable him to cross over the frontier into the so-called "free zone". A lady of his acquaintance, wishing to help him obtain this necessary visa, invited him to a reception at which she promised she would introduce him to a German functionary she happened to know who could easily be persuaded into complying with Jouhandeau's request. The lady, who appears to have been no more than one of the by then well-established author's many admirers, did in fact introduce him to a certain Lieutenant H. who agreed fully to comply with his request. Jouhandeau might have to make of him.

Four months passed before the benevolent Nazi (a term seldom employed in these memoirs) officer summoned the writer, who had begun to give up all hope of receiving any old from that quarter, to come and see him. The interview led not lasted long before it became clear that Lieutenant H's interest in Jouhandeau was connected only with his being a Jew. Jouhandeau, not with helping him to make a short, quick trip into his native countryside and back. Jouhandeau vigorously denied the offer of a cultural excursion to the land of Goethe and Beethoven, declaring himself to be neither a journalist nor a political writer; he added that in any case he was not free to accept, the date proposed for his tour of Germany being precisely that of the first day of term at the establishment which employed him. No problem, he was told, M. Abel Bonnard (a notorious collaborator) will take care of Jouhandeau's journey. He was told for you will you say, Jouhandeau protested that M. Bonnard had nothing whatever to do with the kind of teaching (*enseignement libre*) he was involved in. Where

M. Abel Bonnard is powerless, the helpful Lieutenant at once replied, M. Bonnard can do nothing. He came on, and we'll contact him on your behalf immediately. The trip had been impeccably prepared.

Jouhandeau went home worried, and the next day confided in the head of his school, a much-respected Canon, his misgivings about this German Jew now planned for him. He was told that after thirty faithful years of teaching he could hardly render the school a greater service than by accepting the Nazi's offer (care must no doubt have again been taken to avoid denigrating the cultivated officer's affiliations with strict accuracy), in order that by so doing he might help to bring about the repatriation of the Canon's second-in-command, whose absence was felt to be increasingly detrimental to the school. So Jouhandeau suppressed his personal feelings of repugnance and prepared to embark on the kind of visit which at about that time many other prominent figures, notably from the very forefront but no less prestigious world of letters, were making. He was told that the first brief entry in his corner de voyage by stating that he was always loathed cowardice; but adds that nothing in his inmost self disposed him to be complaisant towards l'Occupation. Two days later, in the company of someone scarcely known to him who had been substituted for the friend he had been assured would be making the tour with him, he finds himself in Bonn, and after being obliged to appreciate the splendours of the Rothen and either a few hasty impressions of the city, he is told to go to his room. "Pour qui et pour quel sujet?" Pour ce depuis que j'ai su lire, comprendre et saisir, j'ai aimé l'Allemagne et pensai que j'en aurais plus à dire. Jouhandeau, from Bonn via Mainz to Frankfurt, where he inspected Goethe's carefully-preserved house with emotion; then on to Heidelberg, where his guide informed him that in his opinion the appearance

Jouhandeau had a romantic idea of Germany, and there were then, and possibly always will be, many like him in most non-Germanic countries. His view that Germans by and large are as decent as any other Europeans is not disgraceful, and certainly never sufficed to qualify him as a traitor to the essence of his own French ideal of civilization. As his nocturnal meditation in Bonn testifies: "En Allemagne, je me sens français plus que nulle part ailleurs." But his attempt to set his conscience at rest for having allowed himself to undertake this particular journey, one who the intemperately unforgiving, who never much cared for Jouhandeau's persons anyway; but for the record he declares that during his whole life he had never written more than one specifically political article (the two or three others that followed it didn't count in his own eyes, he adds).

At the end of this passage, however, he touches on the spot where he was probably most vulnerable, that is, the Jewish question. If one were to see in his visit to Nazi Germany, a result of his reflections on this particular question, one would be grossly deceiving oneself, he asserts. Whatever Jouhandeau's reflections on the theme of anti-Semitism may have been, they can scarcely have been as irrational as those of Léon Bloy, for instance, himself a Jew-hater, or as those of Catholicism or in any way onologous to the rabid obscurities of Céline (now rehabilitated to the extent of being raised to the status of a twentieth-century classic). As Jouhandeau saw it, all he was trying to do during the autumn of 1941 was to prove that a Frenchman is not necessarily a Germanophile, even in the then prevailing circumstances. "Bien plus, je soulignais la force de mon corps un point, l'essentiel: l'Allemagne et nous," are the concluding words of his apologia. There is surely a touch of involuntary politeness about the typically unbigamous stiffness of those words.

This compromising excursion, which later was to contribute much to the *ennui* and *angoisses* he had to endure, took the observant Jouhandeau from Bonn via Mainz to Frankfurt, where he inspected Goethe's carefully-preserved house with emotion; then on to Heidelberg, where his guide informed him that in his opinion the appearance

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A trader from the badlands

By John Hemming

BRUCE CHATWIN:
The Viceroy of Ouidah
150pp. Cape. £15.95
0 224 018205

In his preface to *The Viceroy of Ouidah*, Bruce Chatwin explains that his original intention had been to write a study of the slave trade between West Africa and Brazil. He was fascinated by Francisco Félix de Sousa, a Brazilian slave-trader who became a blood brother of King Zézo of Dahomey in the early nineteenth century. The Dahomeans were particularly bellicose—"a black Sparta squeezed between the Yoruba tribes of present-day Nigeria and the Ewe tribes of Togo". Sousa (flourished and, to the fury of British abolitionists, became the richest man in West Africa. But changing attitudes to slavery among Europeans and eventually among Brazilians, as well as the mercenary intrigues of Dahomean courtiers, eventually led to his empire's collapse. All that now remains of his empire are rolling dunes and dozens of black outposts in the crumbling town of Ouidah, in the People's Republic of Benin. Across the Atlantic, in the impoverished north-west of Brazil, there are similar relics and descendants of the wicked adventurer.

Two things made Chatwin change his plan. One was an unfortunate misunderstanding when he drove inadvertently towards Lufu airport in a taxi, he became entangled in an abortive map; rebels escaped, Chatwin alone was arrested, and

spent some days that "I should prefer to forget" in a Benin jail. He gained first-hand experience of today's equivalent of King Zézo's slavery, but his research into the life of Francisco de Sousa was cut short. The other deterrent was a reading of Pierre Verger's monumental study of the Benin-Brazil slave trade. Chatwin decided that he could add little to Verger's scholarship, and so instead he wrote a work of fiction.

In *The Viceroy of Ouidah*, the real Francisco de Sousa becomes a fictional character. He is a strange story remains unaltered. We read about his tough upbringing in the parched *sertão*, the badlands of the interior of Bahia and Pernambuco. Orphaned in a devastating drought, Silva became a lonely cattle drover, so that his experience of the world was not a comfortable one. He acquired a leathery toughness and stamina which enabled him to survive terrible ordeals in Dahomey; once he was totally submerged in a vat of boiling oil, so that he would turn acceptably black; no further need, he was left without water or shade on foot, to die. When a sudden change of fortune restored his wealth, Silva had seen enough of the gothic Dahomean capital, where the palace pathway was paved with human skulls, and he had no pity or remorse about the manner in which he had come to power. At the height of his power, he invested in a fleet of lumbering clipper fast enough in unsteady British naval waters. But these fast ships sailed on a stormy sea of greed, so that the hatches had to remain bolted and there was a high death-rate among the cargo of slaves.

All this makes a strange setting for the second book of an author

whose *In Patagonia* enjoyed much critical praise. The story is set in the nineteenth century, but it is a tale of the slave trade, but because it is set in the Americas, there is a certain familiarity of the slaves or the mechanics of the slave trade. But there are striking descriptions of the dusty interior and the decay of the humid coast. Almost every page contains moving and evocative observations on some one who has travelled in remote places and who reveals his own feelings or the exotic, the strength of the book lies in the depiction of everything from the look of a man born alive to the hardship of a tree full of a library of sleeping fruit. It is a book to be read in the pictures and the descriptions of a Benin house.

Chatwin reserves his most careful descriptions for anything connected with religion or superstition. He compares the power of a bloody Dahomean king, surrounded by prostrate subjects and the skulls of his victims, and that of a *poderoso do sertão*, a mighty baron of the Brazilian northeast. He notices every custom or ritual that surrounds marriage, childbirth, or particularly death in these regions. He refers to catalogue the curious and exotic kept by all people—by Francisco de Sousa and his eventual decline, or by his daughter.

The Viceroy of Ouidah is a remarkable short for a novel that contains the rise and fall of a man, a dynasty and a nation. It is a powerful and evocative work of art, a masterpiece of brevity. It is a book of amazing adventures in real places and makes compelling reading.

From the Punjab to Gravesend

By Michael Banton

ARTHUR WESLEY HELWEG:
Sikhs in England
The Development of a Migrant Community
175pp. Oxford University Press.
£5.75
0 19 561151 0

Many recent studies of the position of ethnic minorities in Britain have seen the structure of the receiving society as the main influence upon minority-minority relations. They have written about the development of a system of contract labour, embodied in immigration laws, as the state's response to the employers' desire. They have pictured British society as generating an exceedingly ill-defined force, called "racism", which limits the opportunities open to racial minority members and impels them to fight back in particular ways.

There are, of course, other avenues of approach. One of them, admirably illustrated by the book under review, is to start from the sending society: to see the immigrants as people with their own culture, as people utilizing the opportunities for higher earnings in order to pursue the same goals as those pursued by those of their fellows who do not emigrate. This perspective is essential to any understanding of Chinese and South Asian minorities in many parts of the world, Britain included, but it can also illuminate the experience of emigrants from the West Indies.

The British have not been sensitive to these issues because their own emigration has been carried by the waves of European economic success. They have been migrant rulers as much as migrant workers, and when, as in Asia and Africa, they have built up little ethnic colonies, this has been mere forerunners of the group survival service essential to group survival. Doubtless there are people who have returned to Britain from the West Indies because they dislike the prospect of their children growing up to be Americans; they at least have imposed the pain in the transition from the first to the second generation of settlement, but rela-

tively few British people are conscious of how much the psychological costs entailed in changing countries.

The goals which emigrants from the Asian community pursue differ from those of British emigrants, being knitted into linguistic and neighbourhood patterns. Sikhs, as Arthur Wesley Helweg shows, are resented in financial incentives as enthusiastically as any labour workers, but their first concern is for family honour. Savings from work in an English factory can be used to buy land in the Punjab, help female kinswomen make "good" marriages, and to perform services for others. These may include the family's honour, but the misanthropic of one of its members can reduce the standing of everyone else.

In the early years of the Sikh settlement much of this success was due to the men who were on the ground and might work as many as 40 hours a week. They cut their hair, frequented the pubs, and lived as it fell to them about their misconduct. This phase came to an abrupt end in 1959, accelerated by the emigrants' fear that the British would bring in restrictive legislation. Instead of sponsoring the immigration of only male kin they then began to bring ever their wives and female kin. The women established a hot line to the sending society. They told about the delings of their fellow Sikhs, especially of those they disapproved. Consider the case of Kewal Singh, a young man who, as a dutiful son, remitted money to his parents in the Punjab. His father started to arrange a marriage for him. But the bride's family heard that he was often drunk and slept with English girls, and when, as in Asia and Africa, they have built up little ethnic colonies, this has been mere forerunners of the group survival service essential to group survival. Doubtless there are people who have returned to Britain from the West Indies because they dislike the prospect of their children growing up to be Americans; they at least have imposed the pain in the transition from the first to the second generation of settlement, but rela-

tioned and the children brought up in accordance with Punjab practices. Those older girls who thought in ways that might irritate the English were put in their place. Western ideas had to be stamped out, for they could lead only to immorality.

The transient community was present in the Punjab. When successful emigrants visited the Punjab they were received with deference and respect. This respect, but the younger began to say in himself "they are just common labourers in the Punjab, working like dogs, while I am a King on my land". Among members of a farming caste like the Jatts, honour is associated with land, and this is a difficult and dangerous observation to make—the racial prejudice of the English will have a positive effect, for it will make the generation gap within the ethnic community smaller than in the United States. There the second generation resisted against their parents and felt guilty about the pain they caused them. In Britain most of the second- and third-generation Sikhs will want to be identified as Sikhs, and the transient community will be like the hyphenated minorities across the Atlantic (Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans, etc.) but the nature of that group will largely depend upon the scope to which society allows the new colonists.

Jungles, edited by Edward S. Ayest, of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, and written and edited by a team of anthropologists and zoologists (Cape. £16. 0 224 01881 7), is intended as a contribution to the history of the world's rain forests. It is a serviceable companion to the *World's Rain Forests*, a book of the same title, edited by the same team. This informative and generously illustrated analysis of the debate about the relationship between plant and animal life in the tropical rain forest is recommended to the *World Wildlife Fund*.

Haitian divorce

By David Geggus

PIERRE PLUCHON:
Toussaint l'Ouverture: de l'esclavage au pouvoir
399pp. Paris: Editions de l'Ecole.
£22.00

WENDE PARKINSON:
"The Gilded African": Toussaint l'Ouverture
212pp. Quartet. £5.99.

The rise and fall of Toussaint l'Ouverture is one of the great personal epics of world history. The story of an African chief, born a slave, who emerged with a vision of freedom from the obscurity of a West Indian plantation to become a figure of international renown. A small, ugly, barely literate black man, within a decade he established himself as one of the most brilliant soldiers and astute statesmen of his day. Betrayed and imprisoned by Napoleon, he died with dignity in a squalid Alpine dungeon.

Personal drama apart, Toussaint's career is one of abiding historical interest. France's minister colony of Saint Domingue, where he lived, was one of the most materially successful of all slave societies. A keystone of the Atlantic economy, it was probably the wealthiest colony in the world, when it collapsed like a house of cards during the French Revolution. The ensuing power struggle between its white and free coloured communities and half a million black slaves, richly complicated by French politics and foreign intervention, offers a fascinating study of the intersection of class and colour conflict and of revolutionary social change. Though shaken by the largest slave revolt of all time, the plantation regime in Saint Domingue crumbled surprisingly slowly. Some 70,000 European soldiers died trying to maintain it, but after twelve years of bloodshed the ex-slaves proclaimed the Republic of Haiti, the first free black state in the Americas and the first modern black state.

It was against this backdrop of slavery and revolution that the former colonist of the French Republic, Toussaint, emerged as a dominant figure. Having joined the rebel slaves who had devastated Saint Domingue's fertile northern plain, he fought for the French Republic, once it had declared slavery abolished. Moulding field-slaves and flunkies into an effective guerrilla army, he expelled Spanish and British invaders and slowly manoeuvred himself into a position of supreme power, only to find himself, in 1804, the first black emperor of a new nation.

The subject has attracted much superficial writing but little basic research. At last, however, we have in Pierre Pluchon's biography a work solidly grounded in the massive collections of the Archives Nationales. A work of *haute vulgarisation*, it is rather than an academic monograph, it brings to light much new material and quotes liberally from its sources. By staying close

to the documents, it avoids many of the errors that beset the popular literature and which have been compounded by successive writers. It is essentially a political biography. The author pays little attention either to the military events that built large in most histories of Toussaint or to the social background. The physical environment is not mentioned, and of that strange twilight world in which Saint Domingue slowly became Haiti we learn little. Pluchon is careful, however, to set Toussaint's rise in broad context. While the war with Britain, he notes, produced a political revolution in the blacks' favour, it was the Republic's policy of senescenting absentees' property that carried through a social revolution, of which Toussaint became a guardian. The influence of French Revolution historiography is evident, and the writer's knowledge of Paris politics is put to good use.

Pluchon's stress on the early appearance of a black landholding class is novel. It leads him to dismiss the pro-white aspects of Toussaint's policies, for which black contemporaries (his and ours) have tended to reproach him. Very few whites, he claims, were given back their estates. Toussaint's government was "raciste". "If nationalistic les plantations", it is on the basis of Toussaint's personal rule, 1795-1801, that Pluchon concentrates, not on the campaigns of the 1790s and the War of Independence. Depicting "une féodalité" of local military chiefs, he contrasts Toussaint's political skill with his failure to understand the economic situation. There is a commendable, if unsatisfactory, attempt to quantify economic developments, and some interesting details on Toussaint's white government personnel. Pluchon's account of administrative changes, and of the great slave revolts, is a masterpiece of clarity. Pluchon's account of the Revolution and the black governor in stockpile resources in secret and discreetly to keep the whites at a distance.

In arguing that Toussaint's racialist outlook was merely a facade, Pluchon builds up an important re-evaluation of the man who, with Napoleon, the First Consul, he dominated, initially intended to govern Saint Domingue through Toussaint, until the latter invaded Spanish Saint Domingue, provoking the final French expedition. With the economy in the hands of the blacks and French commerce excluded from it, Toussaint will resist planter pressure to attempt to restore slavery, even after the expedition of 1801 had failed. In this light, the League expedition looks less like an act of vicious megalomania than a last-ditch attempt to keep the plantation regime in French hands. Toussaint is shown all along to be intent on independence, though it is not suggested exactly when this became his goal. The exact question of his failure openly to declare independence is convincingly attributed to the hostility of the United States, Britain, and the allies, and not just to the opposition of the French. The execution of his nephew Moïse was a deliberate play. In the multatin

plot against Governor Laveaux, Toussaint sought not to save him but to overthrow him. Commissioner Sonthonax was sacrificed to appease the French Royalists. A general Hédoirville, similarly driven out, had not really been instructed to sow discord in the colony. In this instance, in Haiti, one senses a certain sympathy for those powerless metropolitan officials, isolated and huffed in a land slipping inexorably away from European influence.

Given a greater familiarity with the military situation, however, some of these judgments might have been revised. This is especially true of the earlier part of the book, where Pluchon is least satisfactory. Had he used Spanish sources, he might have been more reluctant to present Toussaint merely as an opportunist who took no part in organising the Revolution, and who abandoned the Spaniards for the French out of self-interest. Strangely, Toussaint's famous proclamations of August 1793 receive no mention. The well-known Laveaux correspondence is also entirely ignored. This has the further consequence that the complex relationship between the ex-slave and the French aristocrat is given no treatment, though what Pluchon does say is refreshingly unambitious. None of these letters are central to a consideration of Toussaint's complex personality, an area the author illuminates little. Toussaint remains, an enigma: vain but with astonishing self-control, both plain-speaking and devout, ruthlessly ambitious yet devout, humane, even proud.

Pluchon, however, does cast one penetrating ray of light back into the obscurity of Toussaint's past, hitherto a subject only of fable. He recently discovered legal records show him to have been fifteen years before the Revolution and reveal that he himself was a slaveholder, working a small property with a dozen slaves. This was something that the inscrutable slave leader had succeeded in covering up until now.

De l'esclavage au pouvoir is a sober, somewhat spare work. It lacks the fire of the Black Jacobins and does not singulate the classic biographies of Schoelcher and Paulus-Sarrasin, but it is undoubtedly a major study. We may await an explanation of the sources in Spanish and the publication of the definitive *L'Ouverture* correspondence.

Wende Parkinson's book is a popular biography. Its lush claims it is "thoroughly researched" but it is based on the same dozen or so works as many similar biographies. References to documents "from the archives of Haiti" will not bear examination and the listing of archives in the bibliography is quite pretentious. Although the author's imaginative recreations of some aspects of Toussaint's life are not without merit, the text is painfully inaccurate, and not just for the specialists. Added to this are serious misstatements, illustrations of proper names that passes belief, it becomes an irritating book to read. It should, however, introduce many new readers to a fascinating subject.

Pluchon adopts a consistently cynical interpretation of all the key events of Toussaint's career. The execution of his nephew Moïse was a deliberate play. In the multatin

series under the general editorship of Professor Morris-Jones, and it consists of a number of assessments of the state of play given as seminar papers at the University of Manchester before the conclusion of the Lancaster House negotiations. Politics may be the art of the possible, but economics seems to be as easy as cooking. Colin Stoneman, talk whom it may concern just what he must do: aim for the economic independence within five or ten years; meantime require foreign capital to maintain investment and output until Africans have been trained to take over; have compensation assessed by an outside authority (but pay none to those "saboteurs the new policy"); maximise African participation by requiring foreign management to train the entire work force. More interesting is D. G. Clarke's estimate of the effect of sanctions, loudly proclaimed in Rhodesia to be negative until the moment came to demand their withdrawal. He concludes that they did eventually begin to bite, but that the worst suffered were the African population—a legally predictable consequence of any effective blockade.

Richard Hodder-Williams discusses the likely response of different sections of the population to reformist or radical economic policies; James Barber the relations of the new state with its neighbours. John Day goes to great lengths to demonstrate from the statements of the political leaders, and sometimes from the alliances that they have formed, that "tribalism is of no significance in Zimbabwe". He does not see the external enemy is less important than the internal rival. A. R. Wilkinson, the only writer to take into account the situation created by years of internal war, more pertinently refers to "the resurgence of tribal divisions... reflected by the appearance of tribally-based political parties".

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